

# **DHSS Secretary Issues Statement on Potential Impact to Health & Social Services of Proposed Federal Immigration Change**

NEW CASTLE (Oct. 23, 2018) – Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker, a board-certified family physician, is reassuring Delawareans that a proposed change to the public charge rule by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security does not affect current eligibility for health care and social services in Delaware, and that DHSS will work with community providers to address fears in the immigrant community about the proposed change.

The proposed rule seeks to change how the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) determines whether immigrants – when seeking admission to the United States, an extension of their stay or a status change to become a legal permanent resident – are likely to become a public charge, or dependent on government services in the future. If individuals are determined to be a public charge, it may put their immigration status at risk.



Secretary Walker issued this statement on the proposed public charge rule, which is open for public comment on the Federal Register until Dec. 10, 2018:

“Along with Governor Carney’s office and the congressional delegation, DHSS is closely monitoring the proposed change to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s federal public charge rule, which could impact access to such essential services as health care and social services for people in Delaware’s immigrant communities. Eligibility criteria for such services as Medicaid, food benefits and the Children’s Health Insurance Program have not changed.

“We know that there are families – whether their children are U.S. citizens or not – who are afraid to access benefits for fear of what could happen to their immigration status later. The Department of Health and Social Services will work with local health care providers, advocates, community leaders and elected officials to address those fears.

“To build a healthier Delaware, we must reach people where they are and meet their needs, including prenatal care and birth delivery, pediatric care, childhood and adult nutrition, and immunizations, and by reducing emergency department visits and hospitalizations. We want everyone in our state to feel safe when they interact with the health care or social services system. We are here to serve all of the people of Delaware.”

The proposed changes would expand the list of programs that could impact public charge determinations to include non-emergency Medicaid, Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (food benefits) and housing assistance. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is also considering including the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

## **Reaction from Delaware Officials**

"The Trump Administration's recent 'public charge' proposal would go against American values by seeking to penalize immigrants who receive non-cash benefits for which they are eligible, including Medicaid, SNAP, or Section 8 housing," Sen. Tom Carper said. "I have already joined a number of my colleagues in the Senate, including Sen. Coons, in expressing my grave concern regarding this proposal. Immigrants are indispensable to our continued economic growth – and we ought not to penalize these hardworking families for receiving short-term assistance while they pursue the American dream. I am grateful to Governor Carney and Secretary Walker for clarifying that immigrants remain eligible for these benefits until the rule goes into effect. In the meantime, I will continue to work with my colleagues to push back against this harmful proposal."

"I thank Secretary Walker and Governor Carney for seeking to clarify some of the confusion surrounding the public charge proposal," Sen. Chris Coons said. "It's important to remember that the proposed rule has not been finalized and that eligibility criteria for programs like Medicaid, CHIP, and food benefits have not changed. I recently joined a number of my colleagues in the Senate, including Sen. Carper, in sending a letter to the Trump Administration, in which we expressed our grave concerns with the proposal that they put forward. We are hopeful that the Administration will heed our calls and know that we will be monitoring the situation closely."

The Department of Health and Social Services will join with

Governor John Carney's office and other state agencies to monitor the proposed rule, study its potential impacts and work with community partners to support those populations affected in Delaware.

"Access to affordable health care provides families most in need with the opportunity to contribute to their community, thrive and reach their full potential, " said Lolita Lopez, President & CEO of Westside Family Healthcare. "The proposed rule will likely result in Delawareans being deterred from addressing their health care needs, ultimately leading to worse health outcomes and increased costs for Delaware. As a patient-centered community health center serving 31,000 Delawareans each year, we seek to provide appropriate and meaningful access to care for all those who come through our doors. We fear this rule works in contrast to this longstanding goal."

The public may submit comments to the Federal Register on the proposed rule change until Dec. 10, 2018. You can comment on the Federal Register website:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/10/10/2018-21106/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds>

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*The Department of Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of life of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations.*